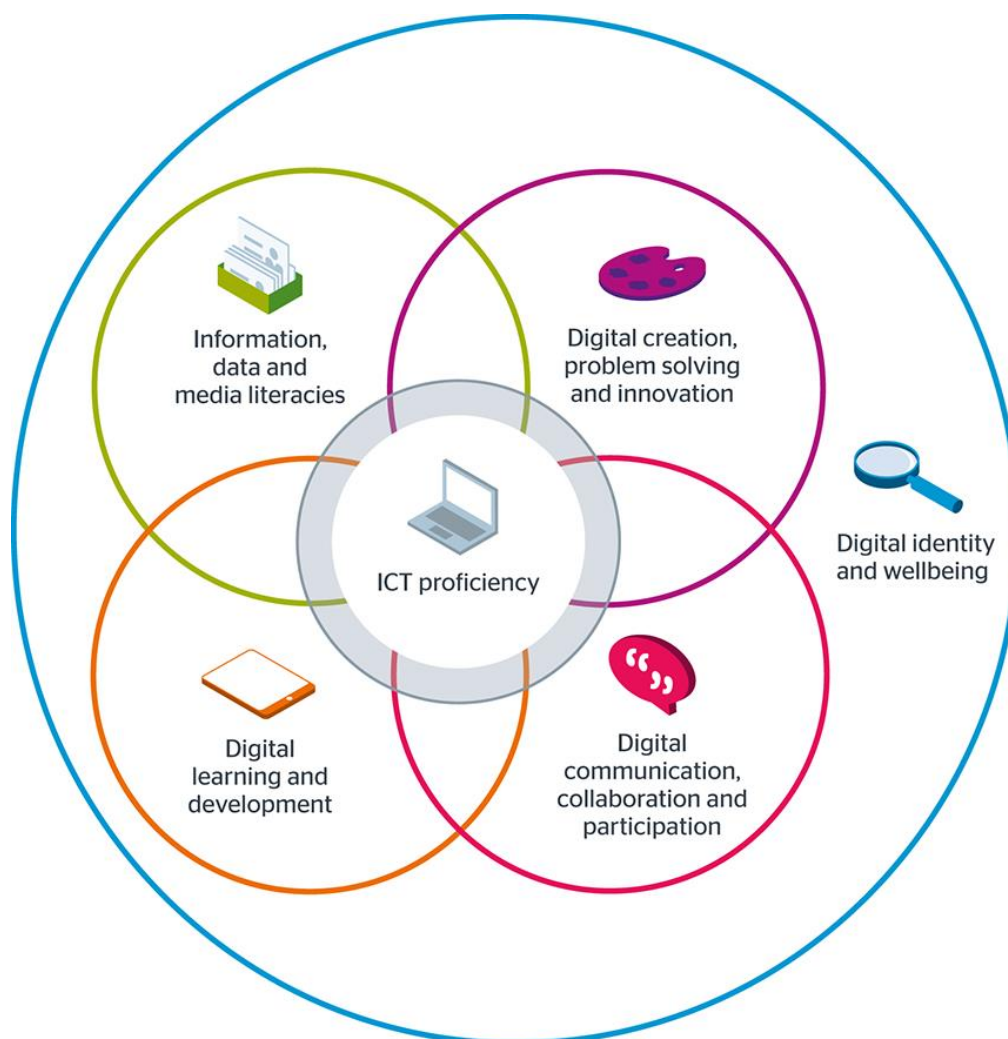


Mindful tech: digital solutions to our digital problems

Freshers' Week is on the horizon, signalling the Autumn term will soon begin, and that some of us will shortly enter the busiest time of our working year. While we are planning how best to support our new and returning students, we should spare a thought for our own wellbeing. One way of grounding ourselves during this busy period is mindfulness. If our days are a chain of events, mindfulness encourages us to focus on one link at a time.

At the end of this month, Jisc's [Building digital capability](#) project will finish, transitioning to a full service in September. Through this project, they have developed a digital capability framework to "describe the skills needed by staff from a wide range of academic, administrative and professional roles to thrive in a digital environment" (Jisc, 2018). This framework contains six elements including one that is conceptualised as encompassing all others: digital identity and wellbeing.



Jisc's definition of digital wellbeing includes the ability to "manage digital workload, overload and distraction" and show "an understanding of the benefits and risks of digital participation in relation to health and wellbeing outcomes" ([2017, p.3](#)). This is particularly important now that many [institutions equip their staff with mobile devices](#).

Certainly, these tools are invaluable. Being able to update a presentation with an iPad or respond to emails on the go allows us to make the most of our time but it can also become too much. We may not be in the office but reaching for our smartphone as soon as we wake can instantly transport us from our bed to our desk. It is a very short step from checking Twitter to sending email when social media and tablet computing have led to the conflation of personal and professional.

For me, the answer to switching off is not simply to shut down my device when I leave the office. There are professional networks and conversations in which I choose to participate outside of work. Stopping notifications and updates from apps does not necessarily solve the problem either; using this strategy actually led me to login more frequently to make sure that I had not missed anything. Trying to ignore alerts and emails is not the only approach though. There are a range of tools that can help us to engage with technology in a more deliberate and mindful way, and enhance our wellbeing as a result (along with other [positive workplace outcomes](#)). For example, I use the following:

- [MyAddictometer](#): described as a “productivity tool” this free app allows you to quickly and easily analyse your phone usage in a visual way. The timeline functions identify specific times of the day and week when usage creeps up. This is a good place to begin thinking about your digital wellbeing.
- [Forest](#): this app encourages you to stay off your device by growing a virtual forest that relates to the length of time you manage to resist using it. For example, ten minutes of focus will give you a small shrub for your forest whereas two hours will reward you with a towering digital evergreen. Not only that but Forest partners with [Trees for the Future](#) to plant real trees so you can feel even better about not using your phone.
- [Headspace](#): provides guided meditations, animations, articles and videos about mindfulness. You can sign up for free to use a limited number of these resources but a subscription is required to access everything. In the packs you can find guided meditations grouped around a particular theme. For example in the *Work & Performance* packs, there are ten sessions each on *Prioritization* and *Productivity*, and thirty sessions to help with *Finding Focus*. There are also single mediations covering *Mindful Tech*, *Presentations* and more. I most often use the walking and commuting meditations on the way to and from work; actually using the phone to enhance my wellbeing.

[UK Universities are making time for mindfulness](#) and the emerging discipline of [contemplative management](#) aims to enable this. When the new academic year begins think about your digital wellbeing and, using tools like those above, let the mindful use of technology bring balance to both your personal and professional life.